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Introduction

History

By Mike Aderhold

For centuries Native Americans observed and hunted Montana's wildlife. Their stories, sketched on rocks and passed on by oral tradition, constitute Montana's earliest wildlife record.

Montana's scientific wildlife record started just 200 years ago with the observations of six members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition (Lewis, Clark, Ordway, Floyd, Gass, and Whitehouse). They followed a western tradition of writing notes on paper. These pioneering naturalists documented the rich variety of wild animals that existed in Montana at the dawn of European settlement.

Heading home in 1806, the Lewis and Clark Expedition passed trappers traveling west. These mountain men were soon followed by traders. They were followed by explorers, surveyors, wealthy tourists, pioneering women, prospectors, cowboys, miners, ranchers, missionaries, merchants, railroaders, tradesmen, speculators, entrepreneurs, wolfers, tuskers, and homesteaders. Their tradition was to live off the land as much as possible. The impacts on fish and wildlife were devastating.

In 1912 William Hornaday, then director of the New York Zoological Park, wrote to several Montanans asking about wildlife that had become extinct or was threatened with extinction. In his 1913 book, *Our Vanishing Wildlife,* it was noted in the Montana section that many birds were on the verge of extinction. But the only animals that had vanished from the wild were free-roaming bison, passenger

pigeons, and whooping cranes. Threatened animals included blue grouse, trumpeter swans, most waterfowl species, long-billed curlews, white-tailed ptarmigans, plovers, grizzly bears, and moose. Montana had fewer than 3,000 elk, less than 3,000 antelope, and very few deer east of the Rockies.

REACTION

The initial reaction of residents of the Montana Territory to their disappearing wildlife heritage included passage of protective legislation, creation of a wildlife agency, introduction of revenue-generating licenses, organization of an enforcement effort, and the start of a wildlife restoration program.

EARLY LEGISLATION (1864–1893)

The first Montana Territorial Legislature (1864–65) passed a bill requiring "…a rod or pole line and hook…to catch trout in the Territory." In 1876 a law was passed prohibiting fishing with explosives, and in 1881 a law was passed prohibiting the dumping of sawdust and mill waste into a stream. Starting in 1883 the popular pastime of collecting bird eggs was prohibited. In 1893 moose and elk hunting seasons were closed statewide.

CREATION OF A MONTANA WILDLIFE AGENCY (1901)

When Montana became the 41st state of the Union on November 8, 1889, county commissioners were empowered to hire one game warden for each county. There was either no money or little concern because no wardens were immediately appointed. By 1900 only 4 of the then 24 counties had hired game wardens. The first board of Fish and Game commissioners was appointed by Governor Robert A. Smith on March 4, 1895. A state game warden, R. A. Wagner, was appointed in July 1898.

The 1901 legislature, acting on a recommendation of the Fish and Game commissioners, organized the Montana Fish and Game Department (April 1, 1901). The charter created fish and game districts and authorized the appointment of up to eight "deputies"—one for each district. The new department received more than 1,000 applications for positions that paid $100 per month including travel expenses.

ENFORCEMENT (1886–1916)

It is impossible to regulate effectively without some degree of enforcement. This was discovered in Yellowstone National Park where, despite federal and state laws, market hunting, souvenir collecting, and livestock trespass were rampant. Early park superintendents and visiting naturalists documented the problem and finally appealed to War Department Secretary W. W. Belknap.

On August 20, 1886, Captain Moses Harris led M Troop, First United States Cavalry, into Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyoming. He took over the duties of the civilian superintendent, and his soldiers assumed the role of park police. Captain Harris was under orders from General Phil Sheridan to control the poachers, stop the vandalism, and protect the buffalo and elk.

Eight years later Congress would pass the Yellowstone Park Protection Act of 1894, giving the army some authority to arrest violators and confiscate their equipment. The army would stay in Yellowstone Park for 32 years and become the model for National Park Service rangers and western state game wardens.

Initially all of Montana's Fish and Game employees were commissioned law enforcement officers. The director was initially called the "State Game Warden," and the district employees were called "Deputy Game Wardens." One of the first assignments of new deputies was to travel throughout their districts posting the game laws.

FIRST LICENSES (1901–1905)

The 1901 legislature required nonresidents to purchase a $25 big game license, and a $15 license was required to hunt game birds. The first resident hunting and fishing license was created in 1905. The cost of the license was $1, at a time when a laborer's wage was $2 a day. Only one license was required per family. There were 30,220 licenses sold in 1905. Receipts for the year were $30,593.50, and expenses incurred by the Fish and Game were $16,788.40. In 1906 receipts totaled $24,491.13, and expenses were $17,410.95.

The new system required a support staff. The first year 300 justices of the peace were supported to some degree by license sales and fines for wildlife violations.

LAND PROTECTION AND RESTORATION (1872–1936)

In 1872 Congress set aside 3,300 square miles of land around the headwaters of the Yellowstone River "…to provide against the wanton destruction of fish and game… and against their capture or the destruction for the purpose of merchandise…" Yellowstone National Park and the enactment of its Protection Act in 1894 were the first field efforts to conserve wildlife habitat in the West.

President Benjamin Harrison started the first government "preserve" in 1892 when he set aside Afognak Island off the coast of Alaska for the protection of terrestrial wildlife, salmon, and sea mammals. President Theodore Roosevelt started the national "refuge" movement in 1903 with Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) off the east coast of Florida. Before leaving office in 1909, Roosevelt created 52 more wildlife refuges on federal land—all by "executive order." In 1908 Congress followed by authorizing federal funds to purchase

12,800 acres from the Flathead Indians for the first part of the National Bison Range.

Between 1911 and 1936 the state of Montana established 46 “preserves,” starting with the Snow Creek, Pryor Mountain, and Gallatin preserves in 1911 and the Sun River Preserve in 1913. Between 1913 and 1925 state refuges and preserves were established in 24 states.

The original “preserve” concept was to protect relic wildlife populations from hunting and human harassment. As these protected populations increased, they naturally spread to adjacent areas, and some resident animals were trapped and relocated to suitable habitat. In 1910, 25 elk from the northern Yellowstone Park winter range were relocated to Fleecer Mountain. This was the first Fish and Game relocation of a big game species. Butte and Anaconda hunters and anglers paid $5 per elk to cover the transportation cost.

In 1907 the Montana Legislature created a $1 resident fishing license. Some of this money was used the next year to open the first state fish hatchery in Anaconda. This hatchery was initially used to raise cutthroat trout to enhance populations throughout their Montana range.

Wardens and Forest Service personnel started surveying elk along the Rocky Mountain Front in 1903.

PITTMAN-ROBERTSON ACT (1937)

In 1936 the first North American Wildlife Conference brought together leaders of the most prominent conservation organizations and representatives from more than 20 agencies concerned about the nation’s wildlife resources. The “proceedings” of this meeting, compiled in one volume and now a collector’s item, brought together more information on the status of North American wildlife and the problems facing wildlife conservation than had ever been published. Out of this meeting came a commitment to develop a “national wildlife program.”

In 1937 the Senate Special Committee on the Conservation of Wildlife Resources and a similar committee in the House introduced a bill earmarking Depression Era excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition to state wildlife agencies for conservation easements, development, and research. The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, or Pittman-Robertson Act (named for the two committee chairmen, Rep. A. Willis Robertson, Virginia, and Sen. Key Pittman, Nevada), became law on September 2, 1937.

This law created a special fund that today continues to earn revenue from an 11 percent federal excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment and a 10 percent tax on handguns. This fund is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Most of the revenue is apportioned among the states by a

formula based on 50 percent on each state's geographic area and 50 percent on the number of hunting-license holders. No state receives less than one-half of 1 percent or more than 5 percent of the amount annually available. These federal allocations must be matched by state funds. States usually provide at least one license dollar for every three federal excise dollars (for every dollar of federal money, the states must match with 33.33 cents). One of the most farsighted features of the act was a 29-word requirement that each state prohibit diversion of hunting-license revenue to other uses. All 50 states have enacted such laws. The goal was to ensure that every state could sustain a long-term wildlife restoration and management program.

This foundation allowed Montana to buy land for wildlife (1938) and to employ its first wildlife biologists (1940). Since its passage, Montana has received $125,230,898 in apportionments (through FY 2004). Most of Montana's 84 Wildlife Management Areas were purchased with these matching funds.

In 1970 amendments to the P-R Act gave Montana an option. Instead of submitting individual projects, the state could submit a "comprehensive fish and wildlife resource management plan" covering a minimum of five years. Once approved, projects encompassed by this plan would be routinely funded.

DINGELL-JOHNSON ACT (1950)

During World War II, Congress enacted excise taxes on fishing equipment. After the war, Rep. John Dingell, Michigan, and Sen. Edwin Johnson, Colorado, put together a bill modeled closely after the P-R program, using revenues originally derived from the 10 percent federal excise tax on fishing rods, creels, reels, artificial lures, baits, and flies. Forty percent of this allocation is based on the state's geographic area and 60 percent on the number of fishing-license holders. This law also had a requirement that each state prohibit the diversion of fishing-license revenues, and there also was a requirement for a 1:3 state:federal match. The statute was officially called the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act. Through FY 2004 Montana has received $103,378,741.

With this new funding the Montana Fish and Game Department (later Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks) hired regional fisheries biologists and started a number of management projects including native fish management in rivers, the impact of logging on streams, fish problems at irrigation diversions, a study of the habits and habitat of native grayling, and, in 1955, the long-remembered exotic fish removal above the site of Tiber Dam.

It was also during the 1950s that the department's seven administrative regions were established, with regional offices set up in Kalispell, Missoula, Bozeman, Great Falls, Billings, Glasgow, and Miles City.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (1965)

In 1963, in response to increasing demands for outdoor recreation, Congress created the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) in the Department of the Interior. Two years later, in 1965, Congress established the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which uses monies from the disposal of federal surplus property, certain user fees, and a portion of the federal royalties from offshore (outer continental shelf) oil and gas production. Money from this fund is appropriated by Congress, and the amount varies. It has been as much as $900 million a year nationwide.

The broad purpose of LWCF is to "…provide a diversity of outdoor recreation resources which would allow individual active participation in a variety of outdoor pastimes…"

Up to 60 percent of the appropriation may be used to cost-share, on a 50:50 matching basis, certain activities carried out by the states, including "…planning, acquisition and development of needed land and water areas…" Responsibility for the program was transferred to the National Park Service in 1981.

Over the years this funding has been erratic. In 1965 the funding was $300 million; $600 million in 1978; and $900 million from 1980 through 1989. During the 1980s dozens of Montana communities funded swimming pools and tennis courts, and FWP's Parks Division purchased Wildhorse Island on Flathead Lake and parts of Giant Springs Heritage State Park in Great Falls.

During the 1990s the appropriations were greatly reduced, and the state/local component of the LWCF dropped to zero between 1995 and 1999. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) all receive LWCF money, which has been used to purchase inholdings, wetlands, and some easements.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACTS (1966, 1969, 1973)

During the 1960s concern grew about the status and conservation of our rarest plants and animals. There was prolonged debate about the role of government in protecting species threatened by human activities. The first result was the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966. That law directed the heads of all federal agencies within the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, and Defense to protect native wildlife declared "endangered." It also provided funds to acquire habitat for these animals, and it required the Secretary of the Interior to identify species in jeopardy.

In 1969 Congress passed the Endangered Species Conservation Act. It expanded the definition of "fish and wildlife" to include reptiles, amphibians, mollusks, and crustaceans. It expanded the listing to include animals classified

as “threatened with extinction,” and it made commercial traffic of “endangered” and “threatened” species illegal.

A few years later Congress enhanced the 1969 act to create the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). With a few changes this is the statute in use today. This law formalized the listing procedure and required the development of “recovery plans.” It increased criminal penalties, added funds for habitat acquisition, and put state “threatened” and “endangered” species under the clear authority and legal jurisdiction of the federal government.

There was also movement at the state level. In 1972 the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) and The Wildlife Society (TWS) developed a model state nongame and endangered species law. The 1973 Montana Legislature adopted this law on July 1, 1973. It granted Fish, Wildlife & Parks the authority to conserve resident “endangered” and “threatened” wildlife and to conduct nongame and endangered species research, acquire habitat for their use, and develop management programs for these species.

Presently, Montana has 14 species listed as either federally “threatened” or “endangered”—four birds, four mammals, three fish, and three plants. The nine threatened species include the bald eagle, piping plover, grizzly bear, gray wolf, Canada lynx, bull trout, water howellia, Spalding’s catchfly, and Ute ladies’-tresses. The five endangered species include the whooping crane, interior least tern, black-footed ferret, pallid sturgeon, and white sturgeon. Nationally there are now 276 threatened species, of which 147 are plants, and 987 endangered species, of which 599 are plants.

FORSYTHE-CHAFEE ACT (1980)

In 1980 Congress passed the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, which is also referred to as the Nongame Act or Forsythe-Chafee Act (John Chafee, Rhode Island, and Edwin Forsythe, New Jersey). This act was meant to promote the conservation of nongame fish and wildlife that receive relatively little (12 to13 percent, 1985, FWS estimate) assistance under the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson statutes. The Forsythe-Chafee Act authorizes federal technical and financial assistance to the states, generally on a 75:25 federal to state matching basis, for the development of plans, programs, and projects benefiting nongame animals. “Nongame” is defined as those species “not ordinarily taken for sport” and which are not listed as “endangered” or “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act.

The Forsythe-Chafee Act was to be financed by general revenue appropriated annually by Congress. The statute authorized appropriations up to $5 million for fiscal years 1982–1985, but neither the Reagan Administration nor Congress ever appropriated any money.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service studied 25 potential funding methods including general appropriations, various fees, and different excise taxes. In 1986 Congress held a hearing on nongame legislation and the financing study, but because of the deficits during the Reagan and the first Bush administrations, this nongame proposal stalled.

MITCHELL ADMENDMENT (1988)

During the 1980s some dramatic declines in shore birds and neotropical migrants were documented. Several bird conservation organizations made this concern a cause, and Congress responded by adjusting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's budget expressly for bird monitoring. New Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell pointed out that the USFWS, under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980, had the responsibility to monitor all migrating birds, not just waterfowl and raptors. The USFWS needed to identify management actions before any particular species became listed as federally threatened or endangered.

This was a strong message from Congress that it was time for the USFWS and other wildlife agencies to reexamine their programs and establish new priorities for all wildlife species. The National Audubon Society dedicated 31 pages to this specific issue in its 1989/1990 Wildlife Report.

PARTNERS IN FLIGHT (1990)

Partners In Flight (PIF) is a cooperative effort involving federal, state, and local government agencies, philanthropic foundations, professional organizations, conservation groups, and the academic community. It was launched in 1990 to promote the conservation of birds not covered by existing conservation activities. Its initial focus was on neotropical migrants—species breeding in North America and wintering in Central and South America.

The goal of Partners In Flight is to focus resources to improve monitoring, inventory, research, management, and education programs involving birds and their habitats. This group and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, Bird Conservation International, the National Audubon Society, and others have kept the pressure on for nongame funding.

TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE INITIATIVE (1995)

The Internation Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) was founded in 1902, and today it includes leaders of wildlife agencies throughout the United States, Canada, and several Central American countries. In 1995 this group took on the challenge of finding money for a comprehensive wildlife management program. Traditionally, wildlife programs in western states have been almost exclusively supported by hunters and anglers.

IAFWA recruited a “team” that included the American Fisheries Society, the Izaak Walton League, the National Wildlife Federation, the National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, The Wildlife Society, the Wildlife Management Institute, and others. They developed a proposal to establish a federal tax on a variety of outdoor supplies including backpacks, sleeping bags, tents, canoes, binoculars, spotting scopes, photographic equipment, bird seed, feeders, etc. The money would be allocated to states to fund programs benefiting nongame wildlife.

This movement eventually attracted more than 3,000 supporting groups, and in 1998 the team introduced the initial version of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA).

MAGNUSON-STEVENS (1996)

During the 1980s and early 1990s, some coastal fish stocks diminished to the point where their survival was questioned. Senators Warren Magnuson, Washington, and Ted Stevens, Alaska, led the discussion about coastal species and their impact on the economy of coastal cities and towns. In the hearing for the Fishery Conservation and Management Act, much was said about the continuing loss of marine, estuarine, and other aquatic habitats. The law highlighted the need for a national program to address conservation and management of the fishery resources throughout the United States. This, along with mounting concern about bird species, added more impetus to the push for a broad-based fish and wildlife conservation program.

CONSERVATION AND REINVESTMENT ACT (CARA) (1997) FIRST ITERATION

The CARA concept came from two places. The first was the Teaming with Wildlife coalition, which initially settled on the “tried and successful” excise tax idea by which hunters and anglers supported the P-R and D-J programs. The challenge was how to get the millions of recreationists who do not hunt or fish to pony up a share of the money needed to research, monitor, and manage the majority of wildlife species not classified as “game.”

The “teaming” concept was a creative partnership of recreation groups, equipment manufacturers, retailers, state and local politicians, land management agencies, wildlife agencies, and others. The number of team members eventually surpassed 3,500. Each group wanted consideration for their special interest. The bill grew weekly and eventually had eight titles, or sections, dealing with a) coastal conservation, b) land and water funding—city parks and recreation areas, c) nongame funding, d) state parks programs, e) historic preservation initiatives, f) federal lands and Indian lands, g) conservation easement and species recovery programs, and h) federal payments in lieu of taxes (PILT payments).

This huge bill got a trial run in 1997. No one was prepared to embrace the whole thing. Unlike the gun manufacturers in 1937, many recreation equipment manufacturers and dealers were reluctant to advocate higher taxes for their customers and higher costs for their products. Some consumers broke ranks with their interest groups and expressed opposition. No senator or representative was willing to sponsor a bill with so many new taxes and so much new spending.

CONSERVATION AND REINVESTMENT ACT (CARA) (1998) SECOND ITERATION

Rather than collect money from people who buy outdoor products, some suggested using the federal royalties and taxes from offshore oil and gas leasing and production. That idea had been around since the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was created in 1965.The revenue, which is more than $4 billion a year, generally goes directly to the Treasury. A slice of it had been pared out for the LWCF, but the bulk of this money had been used to balance the budget since the Carter Administration (1977–1981). The Clinton Administration was enjoying prosperity and a budget surplus, so in a bipartisan move, the proposed funding source for CARA was switched to offshore oil and gas royalties. CARA would guarantee $3 billion annually from the offshore drilling account for a 15-year period for all the programs in the original bill.

This idea started, not with the Teaming with Wildlife crew, but with a comparatively limited four-year-old proposal to use royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling to mitigate the damages caused by those activities. The initial draft plan would have created a revenue-sharing and coastal conservation fund for coastal states and the conservation of coastal areas.

Scores of lawmakers came on board at the prospect of guaranteed funding for their states. Hundreds of grassroots and national conservation groups continued to push the CARA idea in hope of winning earmarked money for their pet projects. President Clinton swore to make passage of CARA a priority in his final 2000 budget negotiations. All 50 governors supported CARA.

The Conservation and Reinvestment Act flew high the summer of 2000. It passed the House with a 315 to 102 vote and had 66 sponsors in the Senate. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee voted 13 to 7 to report the historic legislation to the full Senate.

As the Clinton Administration moved to a close, CARA encountered resistance. Some viewed the guaranteed, mandatory $45 billion, 15-year stream of funding as an “entitlement” that circumvented the appropriations process. Western legislators did not like the LWCF title and its potential to shift more land from the private to the public sector. Some senators balked at the magnitude of the spending and brought up concerns about Social Security and Medicare. Still others voiced concerns about the primary maintenance backlog in national parks

and national wildlife refuges, and suggested dealing with those problems before acquiring new land. Finally, some were angry at the administration's move to create a number of new national monuments.

In the fall, just before the November 2000 presidential election, the White House backed off the CARA proposal and worked out a compromise with the House Interior Appropriations Committee. The $3 billion a year, 15-year, guaranteed $45 billion package was reduced to a 6-year, $12 billion total discretionary fund called CARA Lite. President Clinton signed this bill (HR 4578) on October 11, 2000.

STATE WILDLIFE GRANTS (2001)

In 2001, during the first year of George W. Bush's administration, Congress created the State Wildlife Grant program (SWG). The purpose of State Wildlife Grant funding is to provide help to states to develop broad-based, comprehensive wildlife programs that address all vertebrate wildlife species. The hope is that implementation of such programs will avoid the expense and problems that come with recovering threatened and endangered species.

State Wildlife Grant monies are appropriated annually. So far Montana has received almost $4.5 million: $1.3 million in 2002, $1 million in 2003, $1.08 million in 2004, and $1.09 million in 2005; plus $852,710 from a one-time 2001 transition program called the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP).

In Montana, some State Wildlife Grant funds have been used to survey prairie fish, restore native arctic grayling and westslope cutthroat trout, study sauger genetics and sauger movements in the Yellowstone River, investigate the status of native burbot, support management of the grizzly bear and the gray wolf, conserve black-tailed prairie dogs, and conduct a statewide inventory of small mammals.

To receive future funding, every state must develop a Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy by October 1, 2005. These strategies will help define a more integrated approach to the stewardship of all wildlife species with additional emphasis on species of concern and habitats at risk. The goal is to shift the focus from single species management and highly specialized individual efforts to a more geographically based, landscape-oriented fish and wildlife conservation effort.

Comprehensive Strategy Goals

Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS) embraces all vertebrate species known to exist in Montana, including both game and nongame species, as well as some invertebrate species (freshwater mussels and crayfish). In the early years of fish and wildlife management, the focus was clearly placed on game animals and their related habitats. This focus was, and continues to be, a result of almost all of the agency's funding being provided by hunters and anglers. Although FWP has no intention of reducing the attention focused on important game species, it is apparent that effective conservation actions directed to particular community types will benefit a variety of game and nongame species. As a result, FWP believes that with this new funding mechanism and conservation strategy in place, managing fish and wildlife more comprehensively is a natural progression in the effective conservation of the remarkable fish and wildlife resources of Montana.

Although game species are included in the Strategy, its priority is to describe those species and their related habitats that are in greatest conservation need. "In greatest conservation need" is interpreted to mean focus areas, community types, and species that are significantly degraded or declining, federally listed, or where important distribution and occurrence information to assess the status of individuals and/or groups of species is lacking. Because management of game species has been largely successful over the last 100 years, most have populations that are stable or increasing, and fewer were identified as in greatest conservation need (49 nongame, 11 game).

The methods and databases developed as part of this planning process are powerful tools that could be used in the future to help integrate other fish and wildlife management priorities as they are established. For this particular iteration of the Strategy, the following goals were developed:

- Identify all of Montana's fish and wildlife and related habitats in greatest need of conservation, and meet all eight requirements of WCRP and SWG

- Identify management strategies to conserve fish and wildlife and related habitats in greatest need

- Work independently and in partnership to conserve, enhance, and protect Montana's diverse fish and wildlife resources, and address each species equitably regardless of classification as game or nongame, rare or "at risk"

- Improve FWP's ability to address present and future funding challenges and opportunities

- Integrate monitoring and management of game and nongame fish and wildlife species

Eight Required Elements

Congress identified the required elements of this Strategy in the WCRP legislation, and the USFWS adopted those same elements as a condition of receiving WCRP and SWG funds.

1. Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations, as the state management agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the state's wildlife.

2. Descriptions of locations and the relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of species identified in (1).

3. Descriptions of problems that may adversely affect species or their habitats identified in (1) and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors that may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats.

4. Descriptions of conservation actions determined to be necessary to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions.

5. Proposed plans for monitoring species identified in (1) and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in (4), and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions.

6. Descriptions of procedures to review the Comprehensive Strategy at intervals not to exceed ten years.

7. Plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review, and revision of the Strategy with federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the state or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats.

8. Congress has affirmed through WCRP and SWG and other guidance to FWP and our partners that broad public participation is an essential element of developing and implementing this Strategy, the projects that are carried out while this Strategy is being developed, and the species in greatest need of conservation that Congress has indicated such programs and projects are intended to address.

International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Guidelines

In addition to the eight Congressional requirements, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) established supplemental guidelines to assist with Strategy development (Appendix A). These guidelines provided recommendations within four areas: 1) planning process and partnerships, 2) focus and scope, 3) format and content, and 4) completion, outcomes, and availability. FWP's CFWCS planning team used all of these guidelines in the creation of this document.

Planning Approach

Technical and Steering Committees

Development of the Strategy was guided by a steering committee and a technical committee. The technical committee served in an advisory capacity to the steering committee. Steering committee members guided the planning process including approach to the public and outside agency involvement; allocation of funds (Appendices B, C, and D) approval of methods and results for identifying habitats, species, and survey and inventory priorities; and internal preparation for implementation of the Strategy.

Steering Committee

Chris Smith	Chief of Staff
Larry Peterman	Chief of Field Operations
Ron Aashiem	Administrator of Conservation and Education
Mike Aderhold	Regional Supervisor
Don Childress	Administrator of Wildlife Division
Chris Hunter	Administrator of Fisheries Division

- Roles and Responsibilities: Provide policy-level direction and oversight to development of FWP's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy and use of SWG funds; approve projects to be funded with SWG; and allocate SWG funds and FWP matching funds to support projects.

Technical Committee

Janet Hess-Herbert	Information Management Unit Leader
T.O. Smith	Fish and Wildlife Conservation Planning Coordinator
Adam Brooks	Federal Assistance Coordinator
Rebecca Cooper	Federal Assistance Specialist
Ken McDonald	Fisheries Management Bureau Chief
Tom Palmer	Information Bureau Chief
Jen Pelej	Information Specialist

Brad Schmitz	Regional Fisheries Manager
Jim Williams	Regional Wildlife Manager
Heidi Youmans	Nongame Bureau Chief
Graham Taylor	Regional Wildlife Manager

- Roles and Responsibilities: Assist in the development of FWP's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy; identify, evaluate, and prioritize potential SWG projects; recommend allocation of SWG funds to the steering committee; develop Applications for Federal Assistance (AFA, a document required to receive SWG funds) and other required project documentation, including interim and final reports; and monitor implementation of projects, including tracking budgets and expenditures.

Exploratory Groups

FWP Staff Exploratory Group

A group of FWP staff was assembled early in the planning process at the request of the technical and steering committees to develop ideas about the most effective way to develop Montana's Strategy that would meet all eight Congressional requirements (Appendix E).

FWP Law Enforcement Exploratory Group

Enforcement officers were brought together as an exploratory group, and they identified the ways that law enforcement could help implement the priorities identified by Montana's Strategy if Congress would allow some of future allocated SWG funding to be used for enforcement activities (Appendix F).

Agency and Non-Governmental Organization Exploratory Group

Before planning began, agencies and organizations that manage significant land and water areas or have significant control over these areas were invited to participate in an advisory group meeting led by Jeff Hagener, FWP director. The goal of this meeting was to identify what level of involvement each of these groups wanted to have during the development of the Strategy. All of the participants indicated that their respective agencies and organizations were interested in the Strategy, would like to be informed of progress on the Strategy, and would be willing to provide support as needed. Most participants indicated that they wanted to have the opportunity to review the Strategy prior to its submission to the USFWS (Appendix G).

Public Involvement

Public involvement is critical to development of the Strategy for Montana and will become even more important as FWP moves toward implementation. The first steps toward gaining public involvement in development of the Strategy were to hold an advisory group meeting and conduct a mail-back survey. The purpose of the advisory group meeting, held in October 2003, was to identify what level of involvement stakeholder organizations wanted to have during the Strategy development process. The survey, on the other hand, was administered by mail to randomly selected Montana residents. The goal was to learn their opinions on the types of comprehensive management that SWG funds promote (see Survey Discussion below). The information obtained was used to aid development of the Comprehensive Strategy and will help direct its implementation.

In addition to the advisory group and survey, other public involvement tools were used to involve partner groups, fish and wildlife enthusiasts, landowners, and more. As part of the Strategy review process, FWP held seven public meetings, one per region, where 49 attendees learned more about the Strategy and provided comments. Printed drafts and visual aids were available at the public meetings. In addition, online news pages were developed on the FWP website at www.fwp.mt.gov, under “Wild Things.” Background information and the draft strategy were posted in a user-friendly format to facilitate review and comment. Press releases were issued regarding developments in SWG funding, the release of the draft Strategy for review, and its submittal for publication. All press releases were posted online as well. During the draft review, 59 FWP employees and 18 people either from the general public or representing organizations and other agencies submitted comments concerning the draft Strategy. Names and details of those commenting or attending meetings is available upon request.

After publication of the Strategy, extensive statewide outreach will occur. Outreach plans include print publications, educational materials and programs, press releases, online announcements, posters, magazine and television features, video, face-to-face communications, and more. Audiences will include elected officials (including county commissioners and board members), landowners, conservation groups, agricultural and industry interests, other government agencies, community leaders, tribes, educational institutions, fish and wildlife enthusiasts, hunters and anglers, media, etc. Montana’s public involvement efforts also will be linked to a national information campaign, led by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

The Comprehensive Strategy is designed to be collaborative with local communities and partner groups. Efforts will be made to distribute as much information as possible, solicit and incorporate feedback, and develop support and involvement in the implementation of recommended actions.

SWG Survey

FWP conducted a mail survey of Montana residents during late summer of 2004 to learn their opinions about the types of comprehensive management that SWG promotes. The goals of the survey were to:

- Better understand what Montanans think about FWP conserving *all* fish and wildlife species in Montana

- Provide information that will aid development and future implementation of Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Mail-back surveys were administered to 10,500 randomly selected households across Montana, and a nearly 30 percent response rate to the survey was achieved.

Survey Discussion

Overall, the survey results suggest that most Montanans are supportive of FWP taking a broader role when it comes to managing the state's diverse fish and wildlife. A majority of the survey respondents (62 percent) reported that it is important or very important to them that FWP ensure there are healthy populations of nongame animals.

Implementing the Strategy will be the biggest challenge, and at this point in time, providing the appropriate level of nonfederal match is the biggest concern. This survey asked two key questions related to funding: 1) Are Montanans supportive of FWP using some monies obtained from hunters and anglers to help match federal SWG funding, and 2) Are Montanans willing to help pay for the conservation of nongame animals in ways other than by purchasing hunting and/or fishing licenses and equipment?

Results from the survey revealed that most Montanans are supportive (56 percent) of FWP using some monies obtained from hunters and anglers to help match federal SWG funding. However, there were a significant number (32 percent) of respondents who reported this to be unacceptable to them. Furthermore, only about half of the hunter and anglers identified in the survey found this to be acceptable to them. These findings suggest that while it is acceptable for FWP to use some hunter and angler license dollars for this purpose, the agency needs to act prudently in doing so and should keep hunters and anglers informed of how their license dollars are being used.

Regarding other potential sources of funding to help match federal SWG funding, a majority of the survey respondents (61 percent) said they would not be willing to help pay for the conservation of nongame animals in ways other than by purchasing hunting and/or fishing licenses and equipment. From the survey it

appears that most Montanans are supportive of FWP taking a broader role when it comes to managing the state's fish and wildlife. Yet, most are unwilling to help directly pay for this in ways other than by purchasing hunting and fishing licenses.The results of the survey confirmed that securing alternative funding will be a major challenge for implementation of Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy in the future. Additional research on this topic is recommended if FWP is to successfully take the steps necessary to fully meet the needs of a broader constituency.

The Four Components of Montana's Strategy

Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy is organized into four components. Component I, focus areas, guides attention to specific geographical areas of Montana that are in greatest need of conservation. Component II, community types, identifies habitats along with their related fish and wildlife that are in greatest need of conservation throughout Montana regardless of location. Often, fish and wildlife within a community type face similar conservation concerns. Addressing these concerns using community level conservation allows many species to comprehensively benefit from conservation strategies. However, some species' populations have declined so far, or are so specialized, that conservation strategies aimed at focus areas or community types might not be effective. Therefore, Component III identifies the 60 fish and wildlife species in greatest need of conservation. The conservation concerns for these species should be addressed specifically whether through broad- or fine-scale actions. Finally, there are many species and groups of species for which we do not have available adequate occurrence data in order to determine their status. Component IV provides a list of the species and groups of species that are in greatest need of inventory.

Component I: Geographic focus areas in the landscape that contain significant fish and wildlife communities (species and their associated habitats) that are identified as being in greatest need of conservation.

> *This is a strategy to focus resources and efforts toward geographical areas where they can benefit the largest number of species and communities in need of conservation.*

Component II: Fish and wildlife community types that are in greatest need of conservation (seven identified).

> *This is a high-leverage strategy to address the conservation concerns of whole ecological communities or species groupings. Implementing conservation strategies at this level will comprehensively benefit many fish and wildlife species.*

Component III: Fish and wildlife species that are in greatest need of conservation (60 identified).

> *These are species whose needs must be specifically addressed, whether through focus areas, community types, or individually..*

Component IV: Species and groups of species to be targeted for inventory.

> *Over time, this Strategy will allow FWP to collect data 1) for species or species groups for which we do not have sufficient information to determine their level of conservation need, 2) for species that are important or are indicator species for the health of certain communities, or 3) for species used as measures of success in a comprehensive approach to fish and wildlife management.*

Categorizing the Levels of Conservation Need

Within each component, focus areas, community types, and species were prioritized into three tiers, based on their level of conservation need. Likewise, all species were prioritized for inventory needs using similar definitions. Please review the Methods section of the Strategy to understand how tiers were calculated for focus areas, communities, species, and inventory needs.

Tier I: Greatest conservation need. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has a clear obligation to use its resources to implement conservation actions that provide direct benefit to these species, communities, and focus areas.

Tier II: Moderate conservation need. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks could use its resources to implement conservation actions that provide direct benefit to these species, communities, and focus areas.

Tier III: Lower conservation need. Although important to Montana's wildlife diversity, these species, communities, and focus areas are either abundant and widespread or are believed to have adequate conservation already in place.

Tier IV: Species that are non-native, incidental, or on the periphery of their range and are either expanding or very common in adjacent states.

How To Navigate This Strategy

Most users will be interested in particular components of the Strategy. Readers should decide if they are interested in landscape level conservation, a particular community type, or a specific species.

If You Are Interested in Landscape or Community Scale Conservation

Refer to the Table of Contents and directly reference the ecotype (Component I) or the community type (Component II) that you are interested in. For example, if you are interested in montane forests of western Montana, use the Table of Contents to locate Montane Forest Ecotype, and there you will find listed all individual focus areas under that ecotype. On the other hand, if you are interested in the riparian and wetland community type, refer to the Table of Contents under Component II and proceed to the appropriate page. Within the focus areas and community types, you will find descriptions and a map of the area or type, the fish and wildlife and habitats associated with each, and conservation concerns and strategies, as well as references to selected management plans.

If You Are Interested in Species Scale Conservation

If you are interested in a particular fish or wildlife species, you can use the Table of Contents and look under Component III to locate the page number for any Tier I species you are interested in. You can also use the Species Index (Page 640) and locate the page numbers for any species in the Strategy, regardless of tier. Tables for the focus areas, community types, and inventory needs associated with a species can also provide additional information such as lists of other species that are associated comprehensively with similar areas or community types.

If You Are Interested in Inventory

Proceed directly to the fourth component of the Strategy. Species groups and individual species that are in greatest need of inventory are listed taxonomically. Once you have found the species or group of interest, coded symbols are provided to the right of that species or group that indicate some of the reasons why they are in greatest need. A legend for these codes is provided at the beginning of the Component IV listings.

How This Strategy Works

When fully implemented, this Strategy is intended to be dynamic and is based on the concept that fine-scale information for any of Montana's species will be used to continually refine and adjust the classification for that species when appropriate. This will be accomplished using the inventory component of the Strategy. In turn, modifications to the list of species in greatest need of conservation should help redirect priorities in terms of the most at-risk community types. This information will then be used to direct attention to new geographical areas of Montana and help focus the delivery of the appropriate conservation efforts that help address the most critical areas, where possible. FWP has made every effort to use existing management plans to describe the conservation

concerns and strategies for focus areas, community types, and species. In this way the Strategy attempts to tie together many different plans at different levels in order to facilitate collaboration. A full list of conservation and management plans can be found in Table 1.

Implementing Montana's Comprehensive Strategy

Each of the focus areas, community types, species, and inventory needs along with their conservation concerns and strategies are the conservation priorities for Montana. If a focus area, community type, or species is identified as Tier I in this startegy it can be assumed that their current status is low, declining or imperiled. No conservation strategy identified in this document was singled out as more or less important than any other, because successful conservation of the species and habitats in greatest need will require addressing all of these concerns over time. In addition, singling out certain objectives at the strategic level reduces the flexibility of FWP and its partners to take advantage of conservation opportunities as they occur.

Several challenges must be met in order to successfully implement Montana's Conservation Strategy. First, because the document was developed at the strategic level following Congressional guidance, the conservation concerns and strategies that have been identified are intentionally broad in scope and will need to be further developed at the operational level as the Strategy is implemented. Second, SWG funding is allocated annually, and the amounts have so far been insufficient to fully implement the scope of this Strategy. In addition, the unstable nature of funding serves as a roadblock that could prevent FWP and its partners from committing to long-term projects. We anticipate that this funding status will remain the same in the near future.

These challenges will be met in several ways. Following the submission of Montana's Strategy to the USFWS, FWP and its partners will develop an Action Plan within the year that is operational in nature and that targets the Tier I focus areas, community types, species, and inventory needs that offer the greatest opportunity for leveraging our collective resources. These targets will be selected while considering the immediacy of conservation needs and the limited and varying nature of SWG funding. The conservation targets that are selected will have an operational plan developed that details specific priorities, objectives, actions, and responsibilities of FWP and its partners that will be accomplished prior to the next scheduled revision of the Strategy. In this way, FWP and its partners can more realistically narrow the vast conservation needs of Montana's species and habitats to more accurtately reflect the available levels of SWG funding and ongoing conservation efforts that can be leveraged.